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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: SHOWDOWN BETWEEN SYNAGOGUE AND STATE WITHIN IDF  
OVER EVICTION OF HEBRON SETTLERS

Classified By: Marc J. Sievers, Political Counselor.  
Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d).

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SUMMARY  
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[¶1.](#) (C) Preparations for the August 7 evacuation of Jewish settlers from the Hebron market by IDF soldiers and police led to insubordination by a number of soldiers serving in involved units, with some soldiers saying their rabbis told them not to carry out specific missions. The IDF responded by sentencing twelve soldiers to military confinement for terms of between 10-28 days. The IDF and senior GOI officials have publicly declared that such insubordination cannot be tolerated on any grounds, and that military discipline will be enforced. In the wake of the punishments handed down, some rabbis and religious kibbutz community leaders have issued statements meant to encourage soldiers and activists to avoid situations that may raise questions about following orders. While the Hebron evacuation was a success, it highlights ongoing tensions between religious and secular Israelis within the ranks of the IDF and society at large. End Summary.

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EVACUATION OPERATION CARRIED OUT SUCCESSFULLY  
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[¶2.](#) (SBU) On August 7, 1,000 police and 2,000 IDF soldiers evacuated two Jewish families occupying illegally-seized houses in the Hebron market area in the span of six hours. The estimated 150 right-wing protesters on site supporting the families for the most part resisted passively, with only a few throwing rocks and pieces of cement at the security forces, and others pouring cooking oil and water on them. In comparison to similar evacuation operations, the number of people treated for injuries was low. An Israeli National Police (INP) spokesman said that four IDF soldiers, 14 police officer and 25 protesters were injured. Of those, at least one protester and six of the policemen were hospitalized. Media reports claim the evacuation cost Israel 1.5 million shekels (around USD 370 thousand).

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OPERATION RAISES LONGSTANDING SYNAGOGUE-STATE TENSIONS  
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[¶3.](#) (SBU) Tension exists within Israeli society between secular and religious Israelis across the full spectrum of daily living. With respect to compulsory military service, secular Israelis complain about the exemption that young male yeshiva students (as well as any religious young women who choose to be exempt) get, arguing that religious Israelis obtain the full benefits of citizenship without having to defend them. That general impression glosses over the fact that there are religious units within the IDF -- some of

which have historically taken on the most dangerous missions, as was the case during last summer's war with Lebanon. Religious students can serve through the Yeshivot Hesder program, and many do in battalions like the Haredi Nahal, which has over a thousand soldiers. The fact that there are religious units potentially addresses criticism from secular Israelis, but also raises a potential weak point in the IDF -- the capabilities of these units can be effectively nullified when their members' rabbis tell them not to carry out orders. Whole units with special, tested combat skills can essentially refuse to serve.

14. (SBU) Preparations for the evacuation cast light on long-standing tensions between the state and religious-nationalist leaders in Israel. According to media reports, hundreds of IDF soldiers and officers have been avoiding participation in evacuation of settlers over the past two years, with the knowledge of their commanders, and sometimes even with their encouragement. Soldiers refusing to take part in such missions reportedly have been assigned to guarding tent encampments, washing dishes and helping to cook, and renovating outposts. One officer of the vaunted Golan Brigade noted to a journalist that commanders want to avoid trouble and resolve such issues delicately. He said, "If a company commander needs 30 soldiers for a certain mission, and has 20 extra soldiers he will make sure that in the case of an evacuation of an outpost, the religious soldiers will be sent for kitchen duty." On August 6, when soldiers of the Duchifat Battalion heard that they were going to replace Border Police who would be evacuating the Hebron market settlers, 38 of them told their commanders that they would not serve in the missions related to the evacuation, saying that their rabbis and parents told them participation would be inconsistent with their religious obligations.

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15. (SBU) Responding to these reports, the IDF and senior GOI officials struck a strict tone in their public comments, with the IDF's spokesman stressing that "IDF soldiers must carry out their commanders' orders. A request by a soldier is weighed individually and examined in depth. A soldier who chooses not to obey an order and gives an excuse and lies, should be punished and dealt with using disciplinary measures." Defense Minister Barak -- who is seen as having restored credibility to the MOD after the departure of his predecessor -- condemned the insubordination, stating, "Our army is the only one we have. The soldiers take orders from the company, platoon and battalion commanding officers, and not from anyone else, no matter how important or respected. The army of a country that wishes to live is based on this principle." Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann said that the soldiers' refusal to obey their orders "undermines the foundations of Israel's existence and severely damages state security." He added that such disobedience "damages the basic convention that ideological disputes must never find their way into the army and influence its performance."

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IDF DROPS THE HAMMER, INFLUENTIAL VOICES REACT  
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16. (SBU) In the wake of the evacuation operation, the IDF addressed the insubordination. Twelve soldiers of the Duchifat battalion who refused orders to take part in missions related to the evacuation were sentenced to military prison terms ranging from 10-28 days. Some ultra-orthodox rabbis associated with the Haredi Nahal battalion denounced attempts by right-wing activists to persuade the soldiers of the battalion to disobey orders, and threatened to close the battalion to national-religious soldiers. Leaders of the secular Kibbutz Movement, for their part, called upon secular kibbutz youth to enlist in combat units that serve in the West Bank, such as the Kfir Brigade, so as to reduce cases of disobedience by religious soldiers.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) The insubordination within the IDF ranks leading up to the Hebron evacuation is an indication of the seriousness of the problem which the MOD and IDF commanders have ignored for the past few years. The Hebron market evacuation, in which 3,000 soldiers and police were mobilized to evict two settler families, portends what is likely to be seen when the IDF and other security forces are called upon to evacuate settlements and outposts in the West Bank in the future. Future such evacuation operations will test the IDF, and may lead eventually to self-inflicted winnowing of the ranks, with more religiously-minded soldiers being discharged. While this may make the corps of the IDF's soldiery more compliant, it will also serve to heighten tensions between Israel's secular majority and religious minority -- tensions that already hinge in part on the unwillingness of many religious Israelis to serve in the IDF.

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